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REVIEWS

A GERMAN VIEW OF AMERICAN LETTERS

Professor Kellner's *American Literature*¹ is not a history of American literature. It begins in a too deprecatory vein to allow the writer to arrive at the heart of the matter. After a vigorous summary of our history, Professor Kellner says: "We look in vain, however, for an epic that glorifies those great deeds; for a historical production that does justice to those conquerors and pathfinders of heroic proportions. Neither the verse of Longfellow, nor the prose of Hawthorne rises to the height of the subject." Professor Kellner forgets that epic action is capable of other expression than the conventional epic form; the day of the epic form had gone by when America came into its own. As for Longfellow and Hawthorne, they did not see America whole. Longfellow's romantic inspiration was the literature of Europe first, and the Indian and the Puritan last; Hawthorne saw no farther than a decadent Puritanism; both are but partially American. It is Whitman who saw America suffering and triumphant. America not merely a nation but a gospel. In him is the epic significance of America. That he expressed this lyrically, whereas other nations live in their *Iliad* and history plays, makes Whitman the unifying force of our literature, because in him is the dissidence of dissent, and the protestantism of protestants, and all revolts of all revolutionists are transformed to passionate lyric affirmation.

Our literature has a spiritual unity—which Professor Kellner somehow has missed. What is stimulating in this criticism is the value which is put upon individual writers. Several of them, if they were living, would rejoice to see themselves in these pages. Lowell is given a higher place as a critic than he has yet been given. The latest estimates of him need revision, if Professor Kellner is right. Oliver Wendell Holmes has probably never been so thoroughly read as he has been by Professor Kellner, nor so enthusiastically applauded.

Holmes is the best representative of the spirit of the nineteenth century, if one is willing to reckon the last ten, or possibly the last fifteen, years as

¹ *American Literature*. By Leon Kellner, Professor in the University of Czernowitz. Translated from the German by Julia Franklin with a Preface by Gustav Pollak. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Page & Co., 1915.

belonging to a new period. The century of natural sciences and inventions; of intellectual, moral, and political emancipation; the century that in all things explains the present by the past; the century that produced philosophers without systems—that marvelous century might be inferred from the writings of this American provincial were all other literature to disappear from the face of the earth at the behest of a new Omar.

A very agreeable part of Professor Kellner's book is the German bias. It was written before August, 1914, and this bias means nothing more than a personal interpretation of some of our writers. Longfellow is called the American Herder. This does not exactly describe either Longfellow or Herder, but it does allow for a poetic fellowship, in which both Americans and Germans can rejoice. We must all renew our reading of Hans Brinkmann again, for Professor Kellner has valued him anew for us. The whole book is a stimulus, even though its main thesis—the inadequacy of our literary expression—is not sustained when individual writers are tested. This alone justifies the publishing of this book as one of the series "The American Books."

The descendants of this little band have in the space of two hundred and fifty years exterminated the native, assimilated the French and Dutch, driven back the Spaniards, and—most difficult of all their Herculean tasks—thrown off the yoke of the mother-country.

When has human will accomplished anything so great in so brief a space? Do not all heroic acts of ancient and mediaeval history shrink into insignificance by the side of this miracle?

ELLEN FITZ GERALD

BOOK NOTICES

[Mention under this head does not preclude review elsewhere.]

The School and Society. By JOHN DEWEY. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1915. Pp. 164. \$1.00.

A revised edition with five chapters added. These are made up mainly of material originally contributed to the *Elementary School Record*.

The Aims and Defects of College Education. Edited by FOSTER P. BOSWELL. With an Introduction by GEORGE EASTMAN. New York: Putnam, 1915. Pp. 78. 80 cents.

No. 1 of the "Hobart College Series." The volume is made up of the opinions of prominent Americans as digested and discussed by the editor.

Writing of Today: Models of Journalistic Prose. Selected and discussed by J. W. CUNLIFFE and GERHARD R. LOMER. New York: Century Co., 1915. Pp. 386.

An admirable selection covering a wide range of subject and style.